

University of Massachusetts Press

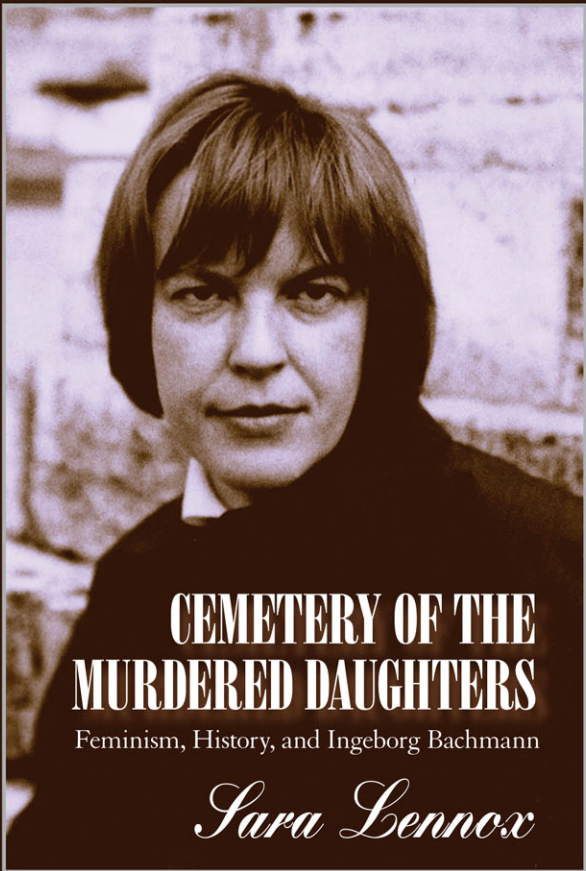
*Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters:
Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann*

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Year 2006

Cover, Preface, Abbreviations, and
Introduction

Sara Lennox



**CEMETERY OF THE
MURDERED DAUGHTERS**

Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann

Sara Lennox

CEMETERY OF THE MURDERED DAUGHTERS

This page intentionally left blank

**CEMETERY
OF THE
MURDERED
DAUGHTERS**

Feminism, History, and
Ingeborg Bachmann

Sara Lennox

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS PRESS
Amherst and Boston

Copyright © 2006 by University of Massachusetts Press

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

LC 2006008285

ISBN 1-55849-552-5 (PAPER) ISBN 1-55849-551-7 (CLOTH)

Designed by Sally Nichols

Set in Adobe Granjon

Printed and bound by The Maple-Vail Book Manufacturing Group

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lennox, Sara.

Cemetery of the murdered daughters : feminism, history, and Ingeborg
Bachmann / Sara Lennox.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-55849-552-5 (pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 1-55849-551-7 (library
cloth : alk. paper) 1. Bachmann, Ingeborg, 1926–1973—Criticism and
interpretation. 2. Feminist criticism. 3. Feminism and literature. I.

Title.

PT2603.A147Z7655 2006

838'.91409—dc22

2006008285

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data are available.

For my father,
and in memory of
Sigi and Susanne

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

Preface ix

Abbreviations xiii

Introduction 1

Part One: Bachmann and History 29

Chapter 1. Bachmann in History: An Overview 31

Chapter 2. Bachmann's Feminist Reception 43

Part Two: A History of Reading Bachmann 83

1981 85

Chapter 3. In the Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: *Malina* 91

Reading Bachmann in 1981 116

1983 119

Chapter 4. Christa Wolf and Ingeborg Bachmann:

Difficulties of Writing the Truth 123

Reading Bachmann in 1983 145

1984 151

Chapter 5. Gender, Race, and History in *The Book of Franza* 157

Reading Bachmann in 1984 183

1985	189
Chapter 6. Bachmann and Wittgenstein	195
Reading Bachmann in 1985	211
1987	215
Chapter 7. Bachmann Reading/Reading Bachmann: <i>The Woman in White</i> in the “Ways of Death”	223
Reading Bachmann in 1987	233
Part Three: Reading Bachmann Historically	239
Chapter 8. Bachmann and Theories of Gender/Sexuality: Representing Femininity in “The Good God of Manhattan”	241
Chapter 9. Bachmann and Postcolonial Theory: White Ladies and Dark Continents	269
Chapter 10. Bachmann and Materialist Feminism: Gender and the Cold War	297
Works Cited	341
Index	375

PREFACE

This book has been a long time in the making, and I've incurred many debts along the way. I would not have started or continued this project without the encouragement of editors (often also good friends) who included my essays on Bachmann in journals and collections: Monika Albrecht, Ute Brandes, Gisela Brinker-Gabler, Jeanette Clausen, Susan Cocalis, Donald Daviau, Elke Fredericksen, the late Marilyn Sibley Fries, Rainer Nägele, the late Henry Schmidt, Inge von Weidenbaum, and Sigrid Weigel. I would also like to thank fellow Bachmann scholars Karen Achberger, Robert Pichl, Karen Remmler, and Leslie Morris for their generosity with information and materials. Hanna Schnedl-Bubenicek and Ursula Kubes-Hofmann offered me hospitality and good company in Vienna. Dr. Heinz Bachmann gave me permission to publish material from the Bachmann archive. Early stages of my research were supported by the Research Council of the University of Massachusetts and the Austrian-American Association of Boston.

Many friends and colleagues accompanied me on the intellectual journey that this book records, and I thank them for their counsel and comradeship along the way. My feminist sisters in *Women in German* stood behind me through the hard decades during which early feminists in German Studies like me established themselves in the U.S. academy, and I thank them for being there. The long years of friendship with Wiggies like Angelika Bammer, Sara Friedrichsmeyer, and Patricia Herminhouse, along with those mentioned above and many others, have been especially important for me. I thank my colleagues

in the German Studies Association, especially the women historians, for helping me learn to think historically. The support of senior male colleagues Peter Uwe Hohendahl and Frank Trommler also emboldened me to elaborate sometimes iconoclastic ideas. My colleagues in the former Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, now the Program in German and Scandinavian Studies, especially Barton Byg, have contributed to the transformation of our field and my own thinking which made this book possible. Over many years my friend Arlene Avakian and other UMass Women's Studies colleagues have been central to my learning to think of gender as always complexly inflected by many other changing social categories, particularly ethnicity and race, and my friend Sabine Broeck helped me to understand how to think about gender and race in German-speaking contexts. Though John Bracey often disagreed with me, his ideas have left a strong imprint on these pages. I thank Julia Demmin for understanding and encouragement at many crucial moments. In the early years of this book my son, Jonathan, patiently listened to me talk through my ideas about Bachmann over many a meal and helped me to weather many crises of confidence; as an adult he kindly saved me from many a computer catastrophe. Finally, for over twenty-five years the staff and students of the Social Thought and Political Economy Program helped me to acquire the education in interdisciplinarity that, I hope, informs this book and also to remember what my real priorities are. They and countless other activist friends and allies again and again demonstrated their political steadfastness on the occasions I discuss in Part Two and continue to the present day. I thank them for their principled solidarity, which keeps hope alive in these hard times.

Somewhat or substantially revised, the chapters of this book first appeared in the following books and journals: chapter 1 as "Ingeborg Bachmann," *German-Language Women Writers: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Elke Fredericksen and Elizabeth Ametsbichler (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishers, 1998), 56–68; a much earlier version of chapter 2 as "The Feminist Reception of Ingeborg Bachmann," *Women in German Yearbook* 8, ed. Jeanette Clausen and Sara Friedrichsmeyer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 73–111; chapter 3 as "In the Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina*," *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 5.1 (Fall 1980), 75–105; chapter 4 as "Christa Wolf and Ingeborg Bachmann: The Difficulties of Writing the Truth," *Responses to Christa Wolf: Critical Essays*, ed. Marilyn Sibley Fries (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 128–148; chapter 5 as "Geschlecht, Rasse und Geschichte in 'Der Fall Franza,'" *text + kritik Sonderband Ingeborg*

Bachmann, ed. Sigrid Weigel (München: edition text + kritik, 1984), 156–179; chapter 6 as “Bachmann and Wittgenstein,” *Modern Austrian Literature* 18 3/4 (1985), 239–259; chapter 7 as “Bachmann Reading/Reading Bachmann: Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* in the *Todesarten*,” *German Quarterly* 61.2 (Spring 1988), 183–92; chapter 8 as “Representing Femininity in Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Der gute Gott von Manhattan*,” *Thalia’s Daughters: German Women Dramatists from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Susan Cocalis and Ferrel Rose (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1996), 191–220; parts of chapter 9 as “White Ladies and Dark Continents in Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Todesarten*,” *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy*, ed. Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 247–63; parts of chapter 9 as “The Woman Who Rode Away: Postcoloniality and Gender in ‘Three Paths to the Lake,’” *If We Had the Word: Ingeborg Bachmann. Views and Reviews*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Markus Zisselsberger (Riverside, CA: Ariadne, 2004), 208–20; and parts of chapter 10 as “Gender, Kalter Krieg und Ingeborg Bachmann,” “Über die Zeit schreiben” 3: *Literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Essays zum Werk Ingeborg Bachmanns*, ed. Monika Albrecht and Dirk Göttsche (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), 15–54.

My father, Hayes Sidney King, no longer a patriarch but now a beloved friend, is responsible for my becoming a politically aware and engaged feminist, and I am happy that I can dedicate my book to him. Sigrid Brauner and Susanne Zantop, dear friends whom I have lost, inspired me again and again by their example, and I also dedicate this book to their memory.

This page intentionally left blank

ABBREVIATIONS CITING BACHMANN WORKS

- Aufnahme* *Die kritische Aufnahme der Existentialphilosophie Martin Heideggers.* 1949. Ed. Robert Pichl. München: Piper, 1985.
- Franza* *The Book of Franza and Requiem for Fanny Goldmann.* Trans. Peter Filkins. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999.
- “GG” “The Good God of Manhattan.” Trans. Valerie Tekavec. *Ingeborg Bachmann and Christa Wolf: Selected Prose and Drama.* Ed. Patricia A. Herminghouse. New York: Continuum, 1998. 55–97.
- GuI* *Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden: Gespräche und Interviews.* Ed. Christine Koschel and Inge von Weidenbaum. München: Piper, 1983.
- Malina* *Malina.* Trans. Philip Boehm. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990.
- Paths* *Three Paths to the Lake.* Trans. Mary Fran Gilbert. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1989.
- Reportagen* *Römische Reportagen: Eine Wiederentdeckung.* Ed. Jörg-Dieter Kogel. München: Piper, 1998.
- “Sightseeing” “Sightseeing in an Old City.” Trans. Margaret McCarthy. *Ingeborg Bachmann and Christa Wolf: Selected Prose and Drama.* Ed. Patricia A. Herminghouse. New York: Continuum, 1998. 3–7.
- Songs* *Songs in Flight: The Collected Poems of Ingeborg Bachmann.* Trans. Peter Filkins. New York: Marsilio, 1994.
- Storm* *In the Storm of Roses: Selected Poems.* Trans. and ed. Mark Anderson. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986.

- "To Die" "To Die for Berlin." Trans. Lilian Friedberg. *"If We Had the Word": Ingeborg Bachmann. Views and Reviews.* Ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Markus Zisselsberger. Riverside, CA: Ariadne, 2004. 7–17.
- TP "*Todesarten*"-Projekt. Ed. Dirk Göttsche and Monika Albrecht. 4 vols. München: Piper, 1995.
- TY *The Thirtieth Year.* Trans. Michael Bullock. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964.
- W *Werke.* Ed. Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum, and Clemens Münster. 4 vols. München: Piper, 1978.

CEMETERY OF THE MURDERED DAUGHTERS

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

As readers familiar with Ingeborg Bachmann's writing will recognize, the title of this book, *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters*, is borrowed from an episode that appears both in Bachmann's novel fragment *The Book of Franza* and in her only finished novel, *Malina* (1971)—the “overture,” as she termed it, to the novel cycle “Ways of Death,” an anatomy of contemporary Austrian society left uncompleted when she died in 1973. In both *Franza* and *Malina*, the “cemetery of the murdered daughters” is an image that occurs in a dream of the protagonist. In *Malina*, it is the first of the many “dreams of this night” recounted in the novel's second chapter:

A large window opens, larger than all the windows I have seen, however not onto the courtyard of our house in the Ungargasse, but onto a gloomy field of clouds. A lake might lie below the clouds. I have a suspicion as to what lake it could be. But it's no longer frozen over, it's no longer Carnival and the hearty men's glee clubs which once stood on the ice in the middle of the lake have disappeared. And the lake, which cannot be seen, is hemmed by the many cemeteries. There are no crosses, but over every grave the sky is heavily and darkly overcast; the gravestones, the plaques with their inscriptions are scarcely recognizable. My father is standing next to me and takes his hand off my shoulder, since the gravedigger is heading our way. My father looks at the old man commandingly; fearful of my father's gaze, the gravedigger turns to me. He wants to speak, but merely moves his lips for a long time in silence, and I only hear his last sentence:

This is the cemetery of the murdered daughters.

He shouldn't have said that to me, and I weep bitterly. (*Malina* 113–14)

How should this multivalenced image be interpreted? This book's title gestures toward its multiple meanings: it points not just toward Bachmann's texts but also toward the reading strategies that feminists, among others, have elaborated in order to understand those texts and the various factors that enable those strategies. Specifically, it directs attention to some of the various ways I want to address "Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann," my subtitle.

In a 1953 poem, "Message," Bachmann wrote: "Our godhead, / History, has reserved us a grave / from which there is no resurrection" (*Storm* 55). My title first connects the death and destruction of almost all of Bachmann's female figures to their historical situation and insists upon historical causes for their devastation. Or, as Bachmann put it in a 1971 interview, "It is such a big error to believe that people are only murdered in a war or in a concentration camp—people are murdered in the midst of peace" (*Gul* 89). This is a point I elaborate at length in subsequent chapters. As well, "In the Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters" was the title of my first scholarly tussle with Bachmann's writing in 1980 (an article included here as chapter 3). The title thus also points to this book's concern with the historicity of reading practices and to the use of my own scholarship as an exemplum to demonstrate that historicity. Politically, from the perspective of feminism, "cemetery of the murdered daughters" designates the "woman-as-victim-of-patriarchy" stance that not only informed my own 1980 article on Bachmann but also inflected those of many other feminists, who viewed Bachmann's texts and her life (which they sometimes conflated) as evidence for the legitimacy of their own position.

From a later, rather different, and somewhat more historically specific feminist perspective, the "murdered daughters" can be viewed as a synecdochal representative of *all* victims, either of "the whites" (as *The Book of Franza* seems to suggest) or more particularly of National Socialism. From yet another feminist perspective, the very conception of a "cemetery of the murdered daughters" can become the target of a far-reaching feminist critique of white women who, while denying their own racial privilege, arrogate the status of victims to themselves—or, in the German/Austrian context, targets of a similar critique of white Christian ("Aryan") women who consider women's subordination by the National Socialist regime (which many of them supported) to parallel the treatment of the millions the Nazis murdered. From that standpoint, the title of my book could (and does) represent a repudiation of that feminist posture, banishing to the graveyard of history any notion that the "daughters" *tout court* are always and everywhere victims of the fathers *tout court*.

To come, finally, to the position I would take at the moment (and expand

upon below), one might regard the dream image of the cemetery of the murdered daughters as a device to illustrate how fascism and an ostensibly postfascist era could configure the psyches of female figures, a conception at which Bachmann could arrive as a consequence of her encounter with Frankfurt School theory, which showed her how deeply domination is anchored within the psyche. Thus, perhaps only Bachmann's *figures* (and not Bachmann herself) imagine themselves as consigned to the "cemetery of the murdered daughters," like real-life Austrians and Germans after 1945 regarding themselves as entirely victims of a regime which they in fact helped to sustain.

I have begun by invoking these various interpretations of a central image in Bachmann's work not just to justify the book's title, but also to broach some of the themes that account for its subtitle, "Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann." This volume is not just one of the first English-language book-length examinations of the texts of a twentieth-century woman writer of world stature. I intend it also as a methodological experiment that stresses the varieties of interpretations enabled by a reader's "positionality": that is, her political stance, her social location, and the questions that emerge from the historical moment at which she writes. In its entirety, the study aims not just to illuminate Bachmann's writing but also to read her texts through a *variety* of feminist lenses in order to make at least three points: to show, first, that the questions feminist scholars pose to texts (or to any object of analysis) derive from a specific sociohistorical context and from particular "determinate" (that is, historically specific) political needs; second, that asking different kinds of feminist questions about an object of study can produce different, potentially conflicting, feminist answers; and, third, that the analyses that emerge have different kinds of implications for feminist theory and practice.

This book is thus very deliberately anything but a unified monograph. On the contrary, here I try to present a range of varied, perhaps even contradictory readings of Bachmann which, I argue, are neither right nor wrong but simply *different*. Further, I maintain, each of the readings that follows *and* the methodological experiment in its entirety are enabled by particular historical circumstances. Doubts about the universal applicability of the conclusions at which scholars arrived have emerged in a number of disciplines (such developments themselves a consequence of a changed historical situation), but oddly, to my mind, the concrete consequences for scholarly research of such demands for greater epistemological modesty have rarely been explored, and in practice most Western scholars continue to make truth claims as unabashedly as ever. Moreover, even scholars who call for a recognition of scholarly "situatedness" have

frequently failed to conceive of “situatedness” also as an ever changing position within *time*. Indeed, the entire question of the epistemological implications of change over time (in scholarly approaches and elsewhere) seems to have disappeared even as a blip on theorists’ radar screens since Marxism’s *crise de confiance*, the abandonment of universal history, and the recognition of the rhetoricity of history writing. Scholars seem now rarely to ponder the ways that their own scholarly frameworks may be historically specific (that is, how the questions they ask may ultimately relate to their own historical situations). The methodological experiment of this book is in contrast premised upon the assertion that situatedness in time has epistemological consequences similar to those of situatedness in space. In this introduction I want to elaborate at greater length the theoretical justification for that experiment and end by explaining how I propose to present my analyses of Bachmann’s texts as a vehicle for addressing the methodological conundrums the book poses. I hope that the experiment will be seen not as instrumentalizing Bachmann’s texts for purposes foreign to them but rather as continuing my long-term project of elaborating feminist readings of Bachmann’s texts that address the needs of successive generations of feminist readers.

Why have challenges to universalism and claims for the situatedness of knowledge emerged now? Many scholars now concede that the skepticism toward universalizing paradigms (aka “metanarratives”) which began to emerge in the mid-1960s can finally be traced to decolonization movements after 1945 (among many other impulses, of course) and to other efforts that decolonization inspired (including the U.S. civil rights movements and, indirectly, feminism). Such struggles enabled the emergence of political subjects in the non-Western world and in the West for whose subjectivity universalist Western paradigms had not provided. Though the voices of those new subjects were heard in a wide variety of venues—from debates about the content of school textbooks to battles over canon formation to postcolonial cultural production—at the loftiest theoretical levels the relationship between new theoretical permutations and the real-life political changes that may have underwritten them was less often recognized. (It is startling, for instance, that in her extended introduction to Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak never thematizes how her own intellectual formation as a Western-educated Indian woman might have shaped her understanding of the new French theory.) Robert Young’s *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990) was among the first scholarly investigations to discern that decolonization struggles like those of the Algerian war of independence (1954–1962) produced the intellectual reverber-

ations that led to the rise of French poststructuralism and related developments grouped together under the rubric “postmodernism.” Young put it succinctly: “Postmodernism can best be defined as European culture’s awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant center of the world” (19). Despite the transformations that postmodernism has called forth in many areas of the U.S. academy, it remains surprising that at the levels of abstraction at which debates about “incredulity toward [Western] metanarratives” (Lyotard xxiv) have been conducted, scarcely a theorist has ventured to investigate whether alternative models might exist elsewhere or in what ways postmodern theory might pertain to the non-Western world. Enrique Dussel observes, for instance: “Although [postmodern philosophers] theoretically affirm *difference*, they do not reflect on the origins of these systems that are the fruit of a rationalization proper to the management of the European centrality in the world-system, before which they are profoundly uncritical, and, because of this, they do not attempt to contribute valid alternatives (cultural, economic, political, etc.) for the peripheral nations, or the peoples or great majorities who are dominated by the center and/or the periphery” (18). Subsequent thinkers may have to tease out from postmodern theory those elements relevant for understanding post-Eurocentric political, social, and cultural arrangements which postmodern theorists themselves did not consider.

Another group of scholars, however, many of non-Western origin though frequently teaching in departments of history and anthropology at U.S. universities, have more recently probed the relationship between challenges to universalist paradigms and situatedness from another perspective. These scholars argue that recent historical developments in non-Western societies have given the lie to the universalizing postulations of Western theory. Though nineteenth-century European social theorists conceived modernity to be a phenomenon that would assume identical forms everywhere (cf. Marx’s proclamation that a triumphant capitalist bourgeoisie would create “a world after its own image” [Tucker 477]), these scholars have shown that the diffusion of capitalism throughout the globe (i.e., the phenomenon now known as globalization) has produced heterogeneous, not homogeneous, political, social, and cultural effects, bringing into being other parts of the world that are just as modern as the West but differently so. In the mid-1980s Arjun Appadurai called the forms of social organization he had observed in contemporary Latin American, India, and East Asia “alternative modernities,” and Arif Dirlik argues: “Modernity may no longer be approached as a dialogue internal to Europe or EuroAmerica but as a global discourse in which many participate, producing different formulations

of the modern as lived and envisaged within their local social environments” (“Modernity” 17). Such scholars conclude that categories of European theory may be necessary but are not sufficient to grasp such new realities. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, comments on political modernity in India, his own country of origin: “European thought has a contradictory relationship to such an instance of political modernity. It is both indispensable and inadequate in helping us think through the various life practices that constitute the political and the historical in India” (*Provincializing* 6). As he underlines, it is European theory’s untenable extrapolations from the experiences of a particular cultural grouping to all of humanity, the blindness of European theorists to their own situatedness, that now calls that theory into question: “The shadow of cultural diversity . . . now falls across all universalistic assumptions about the history of human nature that often underlie propositions of modern political philosophies. Their inherent Eurocentrism is what makes these assumptions suspect in the eyes of practitioners today” (“Universalism” 653). At least some scholars of “alternative modernities” are quite aware of the epistemological consequences of renouncing universalisms, potentially calling into question, warns Dirlik, “the very notion of science, and the claims of the social and cultural sciences to scientificity” (“Globalization” 19). Within the framework of his project of “provincializing Europe,” Chakrabarty has been among the most inventive in proposing alternative models. But, as it is far from clear to these scholars how to understand the phenomenon of globalization itself, so the issue of what analytic paradigms will or should succeed European theory is far from resolved. Moreover, though these scholars have determinedly drawn universal frameworks into question, to the best of my knowledge they have less directly thematized in what ways a recognition of the situatedness and partiality of *all* perspectives also demands an acknowledgment of the drastic reduction in the truth claims that their *own* scholarly investigations are entitled to make.

U.S. feminist theorists, on the other hand, arrived at their critique of universalism via a different route, one that from the outset necessitated a recognition of the partiality and provisionality of feminist analysis (although the majority of feminist scholars have still not taken that critique to heart when their own work is in question). Of necessity, feminist thought must assert the masculinist partiality of theories that purport to be universal but denigrate women. In the early 1980s, some feminist theorists tried to elaborate an alternative female/feminist perspective. Adapting Georg Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* for feminist purposes, they argued that speakers who assumed the standpoint of women (analogous to Lukács’s standpoint of the proletariat) would be capable

of articulating truths about and for women (cf., for instance, Hartsock). But unfortunately for such “standpoint theorists,” at about the same time the vigorous interventions of American women of color, at a series of explosive conferences and in a variety of influential anthologies, were forcing white feminists to recognize how frequently their allegations about “all women” were based in fact on false extrapolations from their own white, middle-class experience. In Donna Haraway’s oft-quoted words, “White women . . . discovered (that is, were forced kicking and screaming to notice) the non-innocence of the category ‘woman’” (*Simians* 157).

In the wake of these highly charged encounters, various feminist thinkers turned to postmodern theory for tools that could help them understand differences among women. Attempting to adjudicate between cultural feminism and postmodernism, and responding to the demand to identify the social location of the individual or group speaking for feminism, in 1988 Linda Alcoff advanced the term “positionality” to describe the specificity of the position from which any individual feminist (or, by extension, any other person) acts and speaks: “The concept of positionality includes two points: first, . . . that the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context; but, second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the place where a meaning can be *discovered*” (434, emphasis in original). Feminist standpoint theory still survives as an important perspective within feminist thought, though now transmuted into “an influential part of a more general paradigmatic shift, in both political and scientific thought, away from universalistic theoretical frameworks that would neither account for the particular location of the social subject, nor would they usually accept that it is relevant to do so,” as two feminist commentators observe (Stoelzler/Yuval-Davis 317). Subsequent theorists have refined Alcoff’s definition by showing how female identity comes into being at “the intersection of different and often competing cultural formations of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, and national origin, et cetera, and so forth” (Friedman, *Mappings* 21), and her position is now generally accepted by most academic feminists. Because women are variously situated, many feminists conclude that it is impossible for any observer to assume a “God’s-eye view” that would permit her to speak on behalf of all women, let alone to make allegations claiming more general, even universal, validity. This is, for instance, the basis of Iris M. Young’s critique of Seyla Benhabib’s attempt “to articulate a post-metaphysical defense of moral and political universalism” (Benhabib 174).

Benhabib's model "support[s] a conceptual projection of sameness among people and perspectives at the expense of their differences," Young argues (168). Because feminist theorists have generally been more immediately concerned than other scholars with producing knowledge that can authorize and legitimate praxis, the question of how to ground feminist truth claims has seemed a particularly urgent one. Many feminist thinkers have struggled with the dilemma of how to reconcile an insistence on knowledge's situatedness and partiality with a recognition that some kinds of knowledge seem more "true" (or at least "less false" [Harding 185]) to feminists than others. Susan Hekman observes: "If there are multiple feminist standpoints, then there must be multiple truths and multiple realities. This is a difficult position for those who want to change the world according to a new image" (351). This is an issue that I consider later in this introduction.

How might we factor history into these critiques of universalism? That will, I hope, be the contribution of this book, as I make a plea here for a more emphatically historicized conception of positionality. Though Alcoff invoked the ever changing context within which women are positioned, change over time has received very little attention in recent theorizing. Most theorists of situatedness and positionality have failed to emphasize that knowledge production varies not just synchronically, as a consequence of the social categories that construct the knower or the social location he or she occupies, but also diachronically, because of the changing historical forces that act upon him/her. Though we would surely wish to jettison Marxism's certainty about what direction history is moving, it may nonetheless be salutary to recall Marxism's emphasis on the inevitability of historical change. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels queried rhetorically: "Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?" (Tucker 489). As they emphasize, knowledge produced at any moment by a situated human subject, producer and product of those processes, will necessarily change over time. Bertolt Brecht put it even more pithily: "Da es so ist, bleibt es nicht so" (3: 1233): because it's like that now, it won't stay that way.

Adding such an understanding of history to arguments for situatedness or positionality makes it possible to emphasize that the determinants shaping the situated subject are constantly in the process of change *and* that the knowledge he or she produces will change both in response to changing constellations of determinants and as a consequence of the emergence of new historical problems which his or her knowledge production is intended to address. A focus on the

activity of meaning-making undertaken by a historically situated subject (that is, meaning as actively produced from the perspective of a particular positionality) may make the concrete implications of this historicizing of positionality easier to grasp. In *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*, Rosemary Hennessy uses the term “reading” to denote knowledge production under such conditions, extending the definition “to include all of those meaning-making practices which enable one to act and which shape how one makes her way through the world” (91). For Hennessy (as for many other contemporary feminist scholars), “reading,” knowledge production, or meaning-making is never a practice exterior to discourse or ideology (defined in Louis Althusser’s sense as “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” [162]) but is instead patched together from the interpretive frameworks (i.e., preexisting grids of meaning) ready to hand. Each new reading, and all readings in the conglomerate, are interventions into discourse/ideology which potentially, and to a lesser or greater degree, change all available systems of interpretation. Thus each new reading is produced within a historical context that is potentially at least slightly different from the one that went before. As Marx might have put it, people are simultaneously changed by history and change it. Contesting readings of all sorts can thus be conceived of as historically situated struggles *over time* to determine whose meanings are going to prevail.

One might thus understand this process of reading (in this case, of texts, to bring the issue closer to the specific concerns of this book) as analogous in some ways to Walter Benjamin’s conception, in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” of how the “historical materialist” appropriates the past. For Benjamin, a narrative of the past is not given for all time but is, rather, actively constructed to meet current political needs. He contrasts the position of the historical materialist to that of the historicist, whose ambitions for historiography are encapsulated in the famous phrase of the nineteenth-century historian Leopold von Ranke, history “as it really was”: “wie es eigentlich gewesen” (Ranke 7). But since, for Benjamin, any narrative of history is always interpretation from a particular standpoint, there exists no representation of the past that is a perfect reflection of “what really happened” or that would be valid for all time. On the contrary, the story we tell about the past is the story that is important to us in the present: as Benjamin puts it, “To articulate the past historically . . . means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger.” And, as the present constantly changes, so does our version of the past: “As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret

heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history." Our constructions of the past are thus as transient as the present: "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again." Moreover, since at any moment constructing the past is a highly politicized undertaking, the project of reading the past also involves a struggle over whose meaning will prevail. As Benjamin puts it, "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious" (255).

Without mentioning Benjamin at all, Elizabeth Grosz has provided a more recent gloss on this position that underlines its relevance for contemporary feminism. In the millennium issue of *Signs*, she writes: "What *counts* as history, what is regarded as constituting the past, is that which is deemed to be of relevance to concerns of the present. . . . [I]t is only the interests of the present that serve to vivify or reinvigorate the past. The past is always propelled, in virtual form, in a state of compression or contraction, to futures beyond the present. . . . The past cannot be exhausted through its transcription in the present because it is also the ongoing possibility (or virtuality) that makes *future* histories, the continuous writing of histories, necessary. History is made an inexhaustible enterprise only because of the ongoing movement of time, the precession of futurity, and the multiplicity of positions from which this writing can and will occur" (1019–1021). What Benjamin and Grosz have alleged to be true of history is true, I would maintain, of all interpretive practices, all reading, which also becomes an inexhaustible enterprise that comprises contending interpretations undertaken from a multiplicity of positions across the ongoing movement of time. Out of the abundance of what is present in the text, we appropriate what is most useful to us "in a moment of danger."

Despite feminists' intense theoretical interest in "readings" in the broader and narrower sense, to the best of my knowledge only Donna Haraway has concretely explored the clash of interpretations that is a consequence of readings undertaken from different feminist positionalities. In a 1988 article, "Reading Buchi Emecheta: Contests for Women's Experience in Women's Studies," Haraway examines readings, this time in the narrower sense, of Nigerian novelist Buchi Emecheta's texts by a Nigerian woman, an African American woman, and herself, a Euro-American woman. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, the Nigerian, is critical of Emecheta's works for their failure to affirm the community of African women as powerful, self-sufficient heterosexual women who can

be conceptualized as “co-wives with an absent husband.” Barbara Christian, an African American lesbian, praises Emecheta’s writing for according with her own “agenda of affirming lesbianism within Black feminism and within the model of the inheritance from Africa of the tie between mother and daughter” (“Reading” 118). Haraway herself stresses the aspects of Emecheta’s writing in which she perceives “a space for political accountability and for cherishing ambiguities, multiplicities and affinities without freezing identities” (“Reading” 120). Haraway emphasizes that none of these readings can be faulted for its hostility toward women’s interests, for “all are part of a contemporary struggle to articulate sensitively-specific and powerfully-collective women’s liberatory discourses.” These readings are neither right nor wrong but merely different, each undertaken from the perspective of the specific positionality of the reader. “All readings,” Haraway avers, “are also mis-readings, re-readings, partial readings, imposed readings, and imagined readings of a text that is originally and finally never simply there. Just as the world is *originally* fallen apart, the text is always already enmeshed in contending practices and hopes” (“Reading” 122–23).

Though Haraway here celebrates the different readings that even differently positioned feminist readers can produce, it is obvious that such partiality and provisionality pose multiple problems for theory and practice. What guarantees that “situated knowledges” (cf. Haraway, “Situated Knowledges”) possess any validity at all? On what basis could one knowledge-claim be judged better than another? What criteria could we conceivably use? Or is it perhaps impossible to adjudicate between contending truth-claims at all? Might these varied standpoints make communication impossible even among groups potentially sharing common interests? Dirlik observes, for instance; “To abandon [claims to universal knowledge] is also to resign to the parochialness—and hence the relativity—of all knowledge, which not only abolishes the commonalities born of centuries of global interactions, but also rules out communication across societal boundaries (wherever those may be drawn at any one time and place)” (“Our Ways”). Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford note: “The problem of legitimation remains, so long as the *only* alternative to a discredited value-free objectivity appears to be a postmodern pluralist free-for-all” (4). And such a postmodern free-for-all (cf. Jane Flax: “We set differences to play across boundaries” [91]) does not in any sense guarantee a transformation in feminists’ interest. Even should feminist theory, as Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson counsel, drastically reduce its claims and its reach, “tailor[ing] its methods and its categories to the specific task at hand, using multiple categories when appropriate and forswearing the metaphysical comfort of a single feminist method or feminist

epistemology” (35), how do we know that *this* theory is the most adequate to the “task at hand”? Why does *this* analysis rather than some other best enable feminist action? On what basis could we ever choose among them?

I would like to propose that Marx, with a little help from Georg Lukács, can assist us in finding a solution to these dilemmas. In his second Feuerbach thesis, Marx writes: “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. Man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question” (Tucker 144). Lukács, a neo-Kantian before he became a Marxist, continued to ponder the dilemma of how to discern the truth about the external world and in 1922 published *History and Class Consciousness*, regarded as orthodox Marxism’s classical solution to the problem. Lukács argued that members of the bourgeoisie, whose consciousness is a product of their social location and interests (“social being determines consciousness”), are incapable of understanding the nature of a social reality whose indwelling tendencies are moving history in a direction that demands the abolition of the bourgeoisie as a class. Indeed, Lukács writes: “From a very early stage the ideological history of the bourgeoisie was *nothing but a desperate resistance to every insight into the true nature of the society it had created and thus to a real understanding of its class situation*” (66, emphasis in original). The proletariat, however, which in Lukács’s Hegelian Marxist narrative constitutes the identical subject/object of history, has the capacity both to understand society correctly and to change it (which is after all the point, as Marx emphasizes). Thus Lukács observes: “As the bourgeoisie has the intellectual, organisational and every other advantage, the superiority of the proletariat must lie exclusively in its ability to see society from the centre, as a coherent whole. This means that it is able to act in such a way as to change reality; in the class consciousness of the proletariat theory and practice coincide and so it can consciously throw the weight of its actions onto the scales of history—and this is the deciding factor” (69). Of course, Lukács recognizes that not every member of the working class possesses an identical or accurate understanding of the processes that inform social reality; fatefully, he attributes true class consciousness only to the most advanced members of the working class, the so-called “conscious vanguard” that in his view would of necessity choose the organizational form of the Communist Party. Given the harmony of theory and practice that is the proletariat’s achievement, the continued success or even survival of the Party conversely provides the assurance that the Party’s view of reality is true. As Lukács puts it: “The pre-

eminently practical nature of the Communist Party, the fact that it is a fighting party presupposes its possession of a correct theory, for otherwise the consequences of a false theory would soon destroy it" (327). The chorus of the party anthem of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) compressed into a single sentence the philosophical consequences to be drawn from Lukács's argument: "The Party, the Party, the Party is always right."

Fortunately (or not), the Party no longer provides such epistemological reassurance, but that does not mean that what Marx maintains in his second thesis is wrong. What Richard Wolff observes about postmodern Marxist theory might also be true of feminist theory: "The point about theories is not whether they conform to some absolute standard or test of truth; rather it is that they reflect and transform society *differently*. On that difference rests their value and their significance for Marxists. Upon their differences Marxists must base their decisions to support, reject, attack, or transform alternative theories" (182). Positionality describes not just feminists' (or others') "subjective" choice of politics but also their "objective" social location. Those are both postures they share with many others, and postulations of various sorts undertaken from that positionality may be construed not as universally or eternally true but as potentially valid, hence also as a possible foundation for practice, for those so situated at that point in time. The "truth" (now understood of course in a much more limited and restricted sense) for that grouping might be determined by exploring the degree to which the postulation serves the grouping's interests. (For instance, the allegation that men are superior to women could never be "true" for feminists—though it might be "true" for some groups of men!) Action on the basis of a particular postulation—praxis—might then act as a kind of touchstone to determine whether the purported utility of the postulation in fact stands up in practice. "Truth" in this sense would have to be understood as a political, not an epistemological, variable, and the validity of any particular assertion would be a political achievement, not a given. Moreover, in epistemology as in real practical politics, feminists would be compelled to alter their "truths" if what they asserted they believed (e.g., "men can never be relied upon") prevented them from collaborating with other political groupings to accomplish what they needed. In this sense, the quest for feminist (or other) "truth" would be an undertaking something like the process of coalition-building that Bernice Johnson Reagon describes:

Coalition work is not work done in your home. Coalition work has to be done in the streets. And it is some of the most dangerous work you can do. And you shouldn't look for comfort. Some people will come to a coalition and they rate the

success of the coalition on whether or not they feel good when they get there. They're not looking for a coalition; they're looking for a home! They're looking for a bottle with some milk in it and a nipple, which does not happen in a coalition. You don't get a lot of food in a coalition. You don't get fed a lot in a coalition. In a coalition you have to give, and it is different from your home. You can't stay there all the time. You go to the coalition for a few hours and then you go back and take your bottle wherever it is, and then you go back and coalesce some more. (359)

Truth arrived at via coalition-building—a political, not a philosophical, accomplishment: this could provide the epistemological basis on which we might, as Susan Stanford Friedman suggests, “reinvent a singular feminism that incorporates myriad and often conflicting cultural and political formations in a global context” (*Mappings* 4)

Especially under conditions of globalization, cooperation on the basis of self-interest also furnishes a much more reliable sticking compound for political alliance than moralizing demands for mutual recognition. As Satya Mohanty puts it, “a simple recognition of *differences* across cultures” leads only “to a sentimental charity, for there is nothing in its logic that necessitates our attention to the other” (21). And, should enough participants in such a coalition decide that, politically, certain “truths” or values are in the interest of everyone, we might arrive at something like universalisms after all, as Anthony Giddens proposes: “Humankind in some respects becomes a ‘we,’ facing problems and opportunities where there are no ‘others’” (27). Perhaps that might be a vehicle that could allow us in some nonhomogenizing way or other, via a very roundabout route, to arrive at the utopia evoked by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*: “In the place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Tucker 491), or, similarly, in that stirring line from the “Internationale”: “We have been naught, we shall be all!”

What is the relevance of this theoretical excursus for this book? Its applications are, I think, multiple. First, the readings of Bachmann's texts at which I arrive by Part Three address what seems to me a major lacuna in feminist analysis today. To vary the metaphor, I think feminist theorists have, so to speak, painted themselves into a corner. Through its absolutely essential analysis of white women's obliviousness to their own privilege, feminism created in white women an attitude of obligation and guilt, though not particularly of solidarity, toward women of color domestically and internationally. Otherwise, feminism has focused on the one hand upon women's equal rights with men and, on the other, upon the damage inflicted by men on women: rape, battering, sexual

harassment, and so on. The practical consequence has been a liberal feminist politics that envisions women's integration into the existing society as soon as men learn (or are compelled) to behave. What is missing in feminist analyses of contemporary society (though very visible in contemporary feminist analyses of other historical periods) is how the present order of globalized capitalism is detrimental, in gender-specific ways, even to privileged women. An analysis of how "we"—Northern, First World, white women—are also profoundly damaged, though much less obviously and visibly than Southern women and Northern women of color, by a social order that is not just patriarchal could motivate and energize feminist practice. The absence of this analysis may explain why feminists are absent, as feminists, from the contemporary antiglobalization movement. In my view (that is, from the perspective of my current reading of Bachmann), it is precisely such an understanding of First World (in this case, Central European) women's situatedness within an analogous social order at a somewhat earlier period of history (though one also dominated by the U.S. promotion of capitalism's global sway) which informs Bachmann's writing. Bachmann's analysis of her period and of the situation of women within it is enabled by her profound appropriation of a Frankfurt School analysis, whose leading theorist, Theodor W. Adorno, declared: "There's no right way to live when the world is wrong" ("Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen" [*Minima Moralia* 42]). Like many other great modernist writers—Kafka's name springs most immediately to mind—Bachmann reveals the deformities, scars, and wounds we might not see without her help. In her Frankfurt lectures of 1959-1960 she maintained: "But change is indeed possible. And the transforming effect of new works educates us to new perception, new feeling, new consciousness" (*W* 4: 195). This is the kind of reading of Bachmann's texts—addressing current political issues, transforming consciousness in order to promote change—that I want to mobilize for feminist readers.

More specifically, I argue that Bachmann quite deliberately writes from the perspective of a "historicized positionality," and that is also how she portrays her characters. In her Frankfurt lectures she declares that twentieth-century writing like that of the European modernists differs from nineteenth-century realism because the great nineteenth-century novelists portrayed figures acting within history, whereas twentieth-century writers displayed "history/story *within* the I/psyche" ("die Geschichte *im* Ich" [*W* 4: 230])—a phrase I often invoke in this volume. Bachmann's great accomplishment in the "Ways of Death," the unfinished novel cycle she left behind, was the representational strategy she devised to portray those historically induced deformations of con-

sciousness. As I detail in subsequent chapters, she chose in the “Ways of Death” to construct female figures who are completely products of the discourses of femininity of their era and then to reveal the consequences for women. Though these female figures are rarely wives, they inhabit a world in which masculinity and femininity, defined by notions of extreme gender polarity, are entirely irreconcilable; they prefer the domestic sphere (or ostentatiously assume the roles of men when they leave it); the cosmetic disciplining of the female body is second nature to them. But though the focus of the “Ways of Death” is on women’s realm, the private sphere and intimate relations, Bachmann also insists that women’s domestic circumstances are informed by a larger political context, one that did not suddenly disappear from the world in 1945: “The massacres may be over, but the murderers are still among us” (*W* 3: 341). Or, as she maintained in a 1971 interview, “If, for example, I say nothing in this book *Malina* about the Vietnam War, nothing about so-and-so many catastrophic conditions of our society, then I know how to say it in a different way” (*Gul* 90–91)—another of my favorite quotes.

It is important to emphasize, however, that because these female figures are entirely constructed as merely the point at which discourses of femininity intersect, they have access to no language whatsoever that would allow them to speak either about their own condition or about circumstances outside the purview of women. In *Malina*, the novel that constitutes the “overture” to “Ways of Death,” Bachmann instead *displays* the costs of this historical situation, the psychic disintegration of an unnamed protagonist torn between an indifferent lover and a cerebral and passionless housemate, Malina. By the end of that novel the unnamed woman disappears, and only Malina, now revealed as her male doppelgänger and the embodiment of masculine rationality, is left to narrate the later volumes in the cycle, which are presented as apparently realistic accounts of the everyday lives of female figures completely in compliance with dominant discourses on femininity. Only by way of a somber subtext that disrupts the realistic surface does Bachmann ironically reveal her figures’ destruction—their “Ways of Death—by their male-dominant society and their particular male lovers. Given her project, it is more than a little ironic that many of her earliest feminist readers (including me!—see chapter 3) identified with Bachmann’s figures. But now the reading of their historicized positionality at which this book arrives instead understands the positionality of these entirely socially constructed figures as situated within and inflected by all the other social determinants of the period about which Bachmann wrote.

At the same time, readings derived from this notion of historicized position-

ality must direct attention to the ways Bachmann also packages her analysis of femininity in historically determinate forms: that is, in the terms that were available to her. That is to say, her critical portrait of the situation of Central European women is itself a historical construct confined within the discourses of her time. In her radio plays and fiction of the 1950s, Bachmann both reproduces and challenges the dominant gender discourses of her period but always within the framework of the gender dichotomies that the decade provided. Certainly her focus on male figures during this period can be understood as an exploration of masculine (or “generically human”) identity under siege, destabilized by the anomie of a mass consumer society and its absence of a coherent value system—a common lament of 1950s intellectuals throughout the West. In this regard these texts may be understood as Bachmann’s far-reaching critique of the culture of Germany’s “economic miracle,” while her male figures’ frequent attraction to female seductresses can be read as a protest against the 1950s reimposition of domestic order and bourgeois respectability. But by exploring masculine insecurities as they are played out within their relationships to women, by solving men’s problems at women’s cost, Bachmann also shows herself to be both influenced by and contributing to the reassertion of male control over women at which the decade’s gender discourses aimed. Even in the “Ways of Death” she continued to draw upon the analyses of oppression available to her in the decade before the emergence of the second wave of feminism, particularly those of the Frankfurt School, to understand the oppression of women. As a consequence of her reliance on those approaches, themselves not unimplicated in male dominance, her texts display a number of features that feminists now would regard as problematic: on the one hand an elision of masculinity, instrumental rationality, totalitarian control, fascism, European imperialism, and patriarchy; on the other hand, the postulation of a rebellious female otherness that can express itself only in eroticism, hysteria, psychosomatic symptoms, parapraxes, dreams, or madness. The historicized positionality of these texts (and their author) thus also becomes apparent in the incompatibilities between their positions and our own, and readings undertaken from the standpoint of the (feminist) reader’s historicized positionality must also reveal the ways in which Bachmann is speaking about and from an era that is no longer (like) our own.

Apart from this new approach to specific Bachmann texts, I hope my book will also be considered valuable for its attentiveness to the newest research in women’s history, a reach across disciplinary boundaries far too seldom attempted by feminist literary scholars, and for its attempt to read Bachmann as simultaneously useful for our time and limited by her own. But these are not the reasons

I term the book an experiment in feminist methodology. What makes it experimental is my self-reflexive attention to *myself* as a reader and my effort to explain why it is that I read as I do. Three different developments in feminist methodology led me to undertake this experiment. First, I was dissatisfied with the 1990s methodology of “confessional criticism” in English and American literature as well as the explosion of feminist memoirs in the last decade (see Nancy Miller). Fascinating as I found those texts, I perceived a disjuncture between their authors’ emphasis on their own uniqueness and the general feminist agreement that the subject was socially constructed. What was missing was an exploration of how those writers were *like* everyone else who was similarly situated, not how they were different. Second, though Jane Gallop’s *Around 1981* was quite useful for formulating my project (see chapter 3), I also considered her critique of the feminist literary theory written in 1981, undertaken from her own later perspective, rather unfair. Of course, her historical hindsight allowed her to discern what she believed those earlier writers had overlooked (especially attention to race and the writing of women of color), but that was a general failing of the white academic feminism of the period, and it is likely that “around 1981” Gallop herself would have done no better. (It also appeared to me that directing such critiques at what I now considered the omissions of my *own* work might be a way of addressing these issues without incurring the charge of trashing other feminists’ work that was leveled at Gallop in the volume *Conflicts in Feminism* [Gallop/Hirsch/Miller].) An investigation of how and why feminist literary theory changed seemed to me more useful than self-righteous indignation after the fact about what it had once done wrong. Third, I was very taken by the Haraway analysis of feminist responses to Emecheta’s texts (explored above); but Haraway examined feminist readers who were differently positioned in “space,” so to speak. Certainly, I too can identify some of the social determinants or discursive axes (shared with many others) of my positionality or the location from which I read and write. I am (in no particular order) U.S.-American, female, white, of North European heritage, heterosexual, of lower-middle-class midwestern origin but now of middle-class income and tastes, a home owner, divorced, mother of a grown son, in my early sixties, raised a Methodist, influenced by the U.S. and German student movement, trained in comparative literature and professionally active in the discipline of German Studies, full professor at an underfunded state university located in a very white, quite genteel small town in New England, director of an interdisciplinary program for undergraduates, “et cetera, and so forth” as Friedman puts it (*Mappings* 21). Though surely those different social and cultural formations “interpellate” me into a

range of (frequently contradictory) subject positions (as Althusser would have it), I cannot hope to trace their implications here. My own interest in the neglected category of “history” led me, however, to ponder what the results might be if the *spatial* determinants remained the same and I examined changes over *time*. And these considerations led me to the experiment I undertake in Part II of this book: situating essays on Bachmann that I wrote in the 1980s in the context of the historical factors that acted on me then.

I thus investigate “Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann” in a variety of ways. The book’s three sections undertake somewhat different projects. Part I, “Bachmann and History,” consists of two chapters. The first, “Bachmann in History: An Overview,” briefly situates Bachmann herself and her writing in the history of her period (my final chapter addresses the historical situatedness of both Bachmann and her texts at much greater length). Chapter 1 is intended as an introduction and general orientation for English-language readers, who may not be completely familiar either with Bachmann’s writing or with the Austrian/German context within which she wrote. It provides basic information about her biography and a chronology and brief description of her publications. In effect, this chapter establishes a baseline upon which my subsequent efforts to read Bachmann’s texts and readings of Bachmann’s texts historically may be understood (or: “read”).

Chapter 2, “Bachmann’s Feminist Reception,” begins the process of historicizing by examining how other feminist scholars and critics have read Bachmann. In the 1950s, she gained her fame as the author of two poetry volumes, but her prose texts of the 1960s and early 1970s were much less favorably received during her lifetime. Her reputation today as one of German literature’s outstanding twentieth-century writers is due to her feminist reception from the mid-1970s onward. This chapter explores how the feminist rediscovery of Bachmann was enabled by the particular theoretical assumptions of German (and later U.S.) feminism, itself a product of the cultural climate out of which the women’s movement grew, and reads those and subsequent feminist readings of Bachmann against the backdrop of developments in feminist theory *and* the larger historical changes that influenced feminist transformations. From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, feminist readings of Bachmann were dominated by a radical feminist analysis alleging that all women were victims of all men. Patriarchy had been responsible not only for the oppression of women but also for the repression of femininity, which could “speak” only in venues exterior to male control. It was feminists’ task to retrieve elements of women’s culture previously “hidden from history” and develop alternatives to patriarchal culture. The theo-

retical texts of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva enabled feminist scholars to discover such alternatives in expressions of femininity that disrupted a phallogocentric symbolic order as well as “in our mothers’ gardens.” Bachmann’s texts were read as a contribution to that endeavor, sometimes even as an anticipation of French feminist theory *avant la lettre*. By the mid-1980s this reading had expressed itself in a veritable explosion of feminist Bachmann scholarship, as chapter 2 demonstrates. However, once the radical feminist model was drawn into question (primarily because of critiques of its implicit racism), I identify several years of uncertainty in feminists’ readings of Bachmann, as if they were now unsure how to proceed, and a number of well-known feminist scholars examine Bachmann from a perspective in which gender and feminist issues play no role. In Germany, as I show, that approach continues to some degree into the present, though the German editors of the critical edition of the “Ways of Death” have invested a great deal of energy into promoting excellent Bachmann scholarship that is both feminist and historically specific. Meanwhile, once a new, more historically based feminist method influenced by cultural studies became established in U.S. literary studies, U.S.-trained scholars produced quite innovative new readings of Bachmann by viewing her texts through the lens of feminist variants of the new theoretical paradigms (e.g., postcolonial theory, queer theory) that emerged in the course of the 1990s.

Part II, “A History of Reading Bachmann,” focuses on my experiment in historicizing positionality. I wrote the five essays included there between 1980 and 1987. All of them, I hope, offer interesting and useful readings of Bachmann’s works; several have played quite an influential role within Bachmann research; and each, I think, provides insights into Bachmann’s work that no subsequent scholar has drawn into question. For these reasons, I am very happy to make these essays accessible to a broader readership. Each one, however, is also very clearly a product of its time; were I to address the same questions now, I would write a quite different essay. So here is where the experiment comes in. To frame each essay (that is, to historicize the positionality that informed the perspective from which I wrote it) I have composed a brief, perhaps rather idiosyncratic, historical preface that details the context relevant for me at the time the essay was written. (*En passant*, these frames also form an intellectual history of U.S. academic feminism in the context of the larger political developments impacting upon it.) At the conclusion of each essay I have then undertaken a reading (a reading of the reading, so to speak) that explains in what ways my older essay can be understood as a product of and a feminist response to that historical situation. That is, my current reading understands the older reading

as stressing those aspects of Bachmann's text that "flash up at a moment of danger," "at an instant when [they] can be recognized and [are] never seen again." My readings of Bachmann from the 1980s are, I would now argue, appropriate for their historical moment—neither worse nor better than the ones I would write today but simply different.

Chapter 3, "In the Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: *Malina*," reads the "overture" to Bachmann's "Ways of Death" through the lens of the cultural feminist approach that dominated U.S. and German feminist theory and practice in 1981, when my essay appeared. That approach is responsible for Bachmann's feminist rediscovery and for a shift in scholarly emphasis from her poetry to her prose. My essay is also the first to connect Bachmann, psychoanalysis, and French feminist theory (and can thus also serve as a baseline against which to measure subsequent developments in feminist Bachmann scholarship). In it, I understand *Malina* as an endeavor to explain why women have no authentic voice of their own and in what ways they can "speak" nonetheless. The essay understands Bachmann's interest in Wittgenstein, psychoanalysis and love/eroticism to derive from her attempt to identify forms of speech outside the categories of Western reason (an explanation of Bachmann's intentions I still think is true, though today I would judge it differently). Although the essay concludes that Bachmann herself finds no way to concretize the utopian vision of sensual pleasure and erotic joy that *Malina* also contains, it proposes that what we as feminists learn from this text may allow the "murdered daughters" to turn men's knowledge against them and realize Bachmann's utopia yet.

Chapter 4, "Christa Wolf and Ingeborg Bachmann: Difficulties of Writing the Truth," written in 1983, offers a reading that gives expression to the shifts in feminist emphasis accompanying the early days of the Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl regimes. In my reading of Christa Wolf's reading of Bachmann, I continue to emphasize the search for a feminist alternative to male dominance, but patriarchy is now seen to express itself quite concretely in masculinist war-mongering, a special concern for peace-loving women. Drawing on a very sensitive but still quite Marxist 1966 essay by Wolf, I also now read Bachmann's texts as a social critique directed specifically at fascism, imperialism, and other destructive elements of twentieth-century society. (In *this* essay, Wittgenstein's thought is evidence of insoluble dilemmas of Western culture.) I also use Wolf's analysis to argue that Bachmann's limitations were rooted in her sociohistorical context. Conversely, I trace Wolf's indebtedness to Bachmann as far as her *Cassandra* lectures (published the same year I wrote the essay), showing how Bachmann's anatomy of the status of subjectivity in *her* society increasingly enabled

Wolf's own examination of alienation within GDR socialism. I finally determine that Bachmann's and Wolf's analyses were converging, as Wolf came to accept the cultural feminist approach very apparent in her novel *Cassandra* (and also to propagate a cultural feminist reading of Bachmann) just as U.S. feminists were moving in other directions. In a year of great anxiety about the stationing of cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe, I note both Bachmann's and Wolf's pessimism about the possibility of change but also propose (rather gloomily myself) that the texts of these writers may nonetheless help us to forestall the worst.

Chapter 5, "Gender, Race, and History in *The Book of Franza*," appeared in the landmark 1984 special Bachmann issue of *text + kritik* that proclaimed the (cultural) feminist discovery of "the other Ingeborg Bachmann." Under the influence of the new U.S. feminist attentiveness to race, however, and my own involvement in Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign, my essay, published here for the first time in English, takes a somewhat different tack. I believe I was the first Bachmann scholar to propose that her protagonist's imprecations against "the whites" might in fact be directed at the crimes of European imperialism. U.S. feminists' attention to differences among women also encouraged me to insist upon the historical specificity of Bachmann's critique (and, by exploring via the *New York Times* the historical background of the events to which the novel alludes, to discover that it takes place at a particular moment of Cold War tension). In fact, beginning with something of a polemic directed at the sins and omissions of ahistorical feminist scholarship, my essay reads Bachmann's novel via the (also rather gloomy) optic of German Critical Theory, maintaining that Bachmann extends the Frankfurt School analysis to address colonialism as well as fascism. Though I continue to regard Bachmann's protagonist mainly as an innocent victim of (white) men, I also stress that as a white woman she belongs and has acceded to the oppressor culture and thus has no access to a location exterior to male power (a position that represented something of a sea change in feminist analysis). In perceiving the only utopian moment of the novel to be one where white, brown, and black hands dip silently into the same bowl of food, I also show how strongly I had been influenced by the coalition politics towards which U.S. feminism increasingly moved in the mid-1980s.

I am sure I could not have written chapter 6, "Bachmann and Wittgenstein," without my background in feminist theory, but I remain uncertain about whether or not it is a feminist essay. Its lack of attention to gender certainly bears witness to a widespread loss of confidence in feminist theory and practice and my own dubiousness about the continuing utility of feminist scholarship on

Bachmann. The essay continues my polemic against extracting Bachmann's writing from history and proposes my examination of her indebtedness to Wittgenstein as one way to explore her connections to the Austrian tradition. Though I am far from being a Wittgenstein expert, I think that reading him through Bachmann's eyes also helped me to provide insights into his thought somewhat different from those of professional philosophers. Both my Frankfurt School training and my more recent encounter with poststructuralism (via feminism) allowed me to understand Wittgenstein's thought (and Bachmann's interest in it) as deriving from a critique of totalizing (European) theories. By examining Bachmann's dissertation on Heidegger, I could also demonstrate her ability to connect very abstract philosophical postulations to their concrete political manifestations (e.g., Heidegger's support for National Socialism) and to show why she might have considered Wittgenstein's thought to be an antidote to Heidegger's. Bachmann, my essay argues, is able to grasp the connections between Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and his later *Philosophical Investigations*, which renounce the quest for a totalizing linguistic paradigm altogether and content themselves with a range of heterogeneous "language games." Wittgenstein, I maintain, also helped Bachmann to understand the relationship of universal truth-claims to the triumphs of Western imperialism, but both, I conclude, were unable to imagine a mediation between their far-reaching critique and a practice that might realize it. And perhaps it is here, after the last sentence of my essay, that feminism might enter after all.

In chapter 7, "Bachmann Reading/Reading Bachmann: *The Woman in White* in the 'Ways of Death,'" a certain corner is turned—in my own work, in Bachmann research, in literary scholarship, in feminist theory and practice. Though I was certainly not aware then how weighted the concept would become in my own thinking, it is nonetheless no coincidence that the term "reading" appears—twice!—in the title. In my own scholarship, the essay signals my feminist appropriation of the new cultural-materialist/new-historicist/materialist-feminist/cultural-studies methodology that had more generally taken hold of U.S. literary scholarship around 1987. The essay also marks a change in my own reading of Bachmann, catalyzed by the discovery that she had borrowed the name of the heroic English captain in *The Book of Franza* from the villain in a novel by the prolific Victorian writer Wilkie Collins. This and other intertextual allusions in Bachmann's writing forced me to recognize that all was not as it seemed in Bachmann's texts. Once I understood that her narrative stance in the "Ways of Death" was almost always ironic, I could grasp how her figures are constrained by (or constructs of) the discursive context to which her writing alludes or from

which it borrows. The characters' self-presentation, judgment, and consciousness of themselves is configured by that context, but we readers must see further. In particular, this essay argues that Franza's belief that her beloved captain is freeing her is itself a product of the discourse upon which the Victorian romance also draws, while the apparently innocent whiteness of Wilkie Collins's title is transmuted into the European imperialists against whose power Franza inveighs. Writing this essay taught me to think more complexly about reading itself, showing me how to be more attentive to the politics of literary forms and to recognize the clash of contradictory paradigms within a single text. It also showed me how readings that rather evidently have nothing to do with an author's intentions (the "white" of Wilkie Collins's title as a racial category) can nonetheless be legitimate and useful (especially when they flash up in a moment of danger!). In my work and in feminist literary scholarship as a whole, this essay is representative of the emergence of an entirely new approach—a method that provides the foundation for the essays of this book's third section, "Reading Bachmann Historically."

Written from the perspective of the new historically based theory, the essays of Part Three explore a positionality of a different kind. Through them I want to explode once and for all the claim that there can ever be a *single* correct reading by showing that even a single reader, writing at (approximately) the same point in history but asking different kinds of questions about a text, will still come up with quite different, even potentially contradictory answers. Part Three thus emphasizes the second half of Alcoff's definition of positionality, "the position that women find themselves in . . . actively utilized as a location for the construction of meaning." Here I investigate what happens when the perspective assumed by a particularly positioned reader is deliberately chosen, and the three chapters employ, respectively, methods enabled by theories of sexuality, by postcolonial theory, and by materialist feminism, to ask three quite different kinds of questions about Bachmann texts. Of course, the fact that I am able to utilize different perspectives does not of course mean that my choice of perspectives and methods is not itself historically constrained. Obviously, I did not invent these theoretical approaches (though I believe I am the first to apply them to Bachmann's texts); all three approaches (which, at least as I apply them, could probably all find a home under the more general rubric "cultural studies") gained widespread currency in U.S. literary studies during the 1990s. Moreover, a 1997 *PMLA* forum on "the actual or potential relations between cultural studies and the literary" ("Forum" 257) seems to suggest that the turn to cultural studies is no longer even controversial. Most participants in the forum agree that

at a historical point when literature divorced from its cultural context seems increasingly overspecialized, supportive of dominant ideologies, and irrelevant, a cultural studies approach is the appropriate course for departments of literary studies to pursue. As well, occasional caviling aside, the forum seems to attest to a particular U.S. appropriation of cultural studies that marks a shift away from the sociological and mass and popular culture emphases of its earlier British practitioners and now sees little difficulty in applying the techniques of cultural studies to literary texts (and, conversely, literary techniques of close reading to cultural phenomena). As Lutz Koepnick, a forum participant from my own field of German Studies, puts it, “Literary culture is an essential part of the force field of institutions, meanings, and practices that cultural studies takes as its object; there is no reason that the works of, say, Shakespeare or Goethe cannot be examined from a cultural studies perspective” (266). In the same forum, Lily Phillips proposes that the preeminence of cultural studies may derive from a growing acknowledgment of the importance of the positionality for which this introduction has argued: “Cultural studies has emerged forcefully because the awareness of positionality, context, and difference is endemic to this historical period. The need to acknowledge that there are limits to our models of the world and to think paradigmatically is a gauntlet thrown down by our historical situation, not just by cultural studies” (274). For historical reasons that we will doubtless comprehend entirely only after the fact, the project of “reading [an author’s texts] historically” seems to have become virtually *de rigeur*. As Antony Easthope puts it in his book *Literary into Cultural Studies*, “the old paradigm has collapsed, . . . the moment of crisis symptomatically registered in concern with theory is now passing, and . . . a fresh paradigm has emerged, its status as such proven because we can more or less agree on its terms and use them” (5).

Of the final three chapters, chapter eight, “Bachmann and Theories of Gender/Sexuality: Femininity in ‘The Good God of Manhattan,’” is most able to borrow its methodology from an established corpus of feminist scholarship. Premised upon the contemporary feminist assumption that both gender and sexuality are cultural constructs rather than biological givens, this essay sets out to discover how Bachmann undertook such constructions in a radio play written in 1957 and in what relationship those constructions might stand to other historical developments of the period. As well, in my approach to this radio play I attempt to explore the postulate that cultural productions are patched together out of heterogeneous materials and discover that a reading emphasizing this text’s contradictory representations of femininity and sexuality can be especially illuminating. Specifically, I argue that in this play Bachmann relies on notions of sexu-

ality and femininity like those that Herbert Marcuse advanced in *Eros and Civilization* (which Bachmann probably read shortly after it was published in 1955, possibly during her visit to the United States in summer 1955, which provides the setting for this play). Like Marcuse, Bachmann represents both Eros and women as potent forces hostile to civilization, thus also a powerful source of civilizational critique. At the height of the Cold War in the one-dimensional society of “Manhattan,” I maintain, these may have seemed the only sites at which any subversion at all could have been imagined. But as I myself critique, from a Foucauldian perspective, Marcuse’s and Bachmann’s conception of a form of opposition exterior to a single, totalitarian, and repressive order, I argue that it is also possible to discern a second and somewhat submerged discourse of gender and sexuality in Bachmann’s radio play. Within that discourse, femininity and female sexuality are seen to be products of the power that calls them into being. Though Bachmann’s earlier feminist readers, I finally conclude, stressed the most obvious reading of her play and similar aspects of later texts, a reading that emphasizes their contradictory elements and understands the historical reasons for them may be of more use to feminists of the present day.

Whereas chapter 8 is informed by a very substantial body of feminist analysis, the feminist postcolonial theory that underwrites chapter 9, “Bachmann and Postcolonial Theory: White Ladies and Dark Continents,” has emerged only in very recent years. In fact, it was back in 1984 that I first discovered the episode of the “White Lady” among Bachmann’s unpublished papers in the Vienna archive. Though I believe that even then I grasped something of the reading of that fragment that I have elaborated here, I had to wait fifteen years for the theory to be developed that would allow me to explain it to others. This chapter provides the strongest substantiation for my argument that Bachmann’s “Ways of Death” cycle constructs the female psyche in terms (often borrowed from other literary texts) that their society makes available. I examine Bachmann’s treatment of the representation of femininity, race, and exotic otherness, and I also show how she conveys to careful readers that they should read her texts against the grain. *The Book of Franza* might be read, I suggest, as the story of a typical European tourist’s conviction that the exotic and uncontaminated orient can assuage the depredations wrought upon her by Western civilization (though that tourist drinks Coca-Cola all throughout her journey). Countess Kottwitz’s sexuality is “awakened” only when she is “raped” by an African student with proverbially prodigious sexual capabilities, and Bachmann tells us how to read this scene when the countess, in the scene immediately preceding the rape, orders a cocktail called a “White Lady.” In the long story “Three Paths to the

Lake,” Elisabeth, a good liberal who believes she supports justice for all, is taken aback when people formerly subject to the Austro-Hungarian empire and post-colonials now inhabiting Europe act in ways contrary to her sentimental preconceptions of them—an exoticizing perspective quite like that of D. H. Lawrence’s story “The Woman Who Rode Away,” to which Bachmann’s text alludes. I finally ask how feminists should read such very complex anticolonialist texts of the sort that Bachmann has written and whether, in placing postcolonial figures at the service of an exploration of the White Lady’s psyche, Bachmann reveals that she has not entirely jettisoned Eurocentrism after all.

My designation for the method employed in chapter 10, “Bachmann and Materialist Feminism,” is something of a *Verlegenheitslösung*, as the Germans put it—a solution arrived at for want of anything better—for I’m not sure that the method I employ here has been christened yet. (Since other self-designated materialist feminists are decidedly more orthodoxly Marxist than I, I might also have called my method “cultural materialism” or, even more generically, “cultural studies,” a term now almost a catchall for any method whatsoever that connects texts and contexts.) In this chapter I read Bachmann’s portrait of women (choosing to be) confined to the private arena during the Cold War era as itself a symptom and reflex of the Cold War. To theorize the importance of gender within Cold War politics, I draw on very recent texts by feminist and other sorts of historians of Germany and Austria. Expanding on my brief historical overview in chapter 1, I also respond to Monika Albrecht’s and Dirk Göttsche’s injunction to treat Bachmann more historically (Albrecht, “Vorwort” vii) by showing that Bachmann herself was not entirely untainted by Cold War politics. This chapter explores Bachmann’s evolving critique of the Cold War era and women’s situation within it, but it also shows how she was forced to package her critique in materials available to her. That inevitably meant, as Bachmann herself observed in her Frankfurt lectures, that some of her readers would believe she sanctioned the conditions she was trying to decry. The essay also explores the variety of formal methods she employed to represent the psychic damage wrought by her society and speculates about why those methods were so frequently misunderstood as un- or even antipolitical. The chapter includes an analysis of the almost completed story “Sterben für Berlin” (To die for Berlin) that Bachmann wrote three months after the Berlin Wall went up, and it connects the narrative strategies employed there to those of the “Ways of Death.” In its reprise of and expansion on topics broached in chapter 1, my book refuses, like Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (253–264), a linear and progressive historical narrative. In ending with a quite different

reading of *Malina* than that of chapter 3—the first study of Bachmann I published—my book also once more argues for the “historicized positionality” of this Bachmann reader.

In offering readings of my readings of my readings, I feel at times as if I had entered a hall of mirrors or some tunnel of infinite regress. On the other hand, each new self-reflexive move, I think, makes my point even more emphatically. Where the feminist reader stands, in space and in time, determines what she sees. In all likelihood, her readings will hold true (which is to say, given my definition of “truth,” be politically useful) only for those of us similarly situated. Of course, what is to count as “we” and as “similarly situated” can also be shaped at least in part not just by our “objective” situation but also by how we consciously and deliberately conceive of our political visions and political needs. Whatever the “cemetery of the murdered daughters” means, it is probably not a place to which we wish to be consigned; we too seek intellectual tools that can, in Kafka’s words, function as “the axe for the frozen sea inside us” (16), a sea much like the icy lake on which Bachmann’s cemetery borders. The various readings of Bachmann’s texts in this volume are intended finally to assist feminists in understanding why and in what ways the daughters were murdered and how we ourselves might avoid that fate and envision, even realize, a happier one. That is the importance of Bachmann’s writing—and feminist readings of it.

To demonstrate finally that “historicized positionality” does not condemn feminist or other readers to hapless political isolation, let me conclude this introduction by again invoking Susan Stanford Friedman, a fellow graduate student at the University of Wisconsin at Madison thirty-some years ago, whose recent book *Mappings* I have already cited. In concluding her introduction of *Mappings*, she assumes a political stance so similar to my own (because we are both white U.S. women academics “of a certain age”? because of that formative experience in Madison? because we were then “similarly situated”? because we, as engaged feminist literary scholars, still are?) that it can also serve as my conclusion: “While attempting to respect their rich complexity and unresolved contradictions, I have turned to these texts with a frankly instrumentalist intent—for what they have to teach academic feminism, for their potential interventions in the great debates of the day, and for their collective wisdom and pleasure. The stories they tell matter. So do the stories we tell about them” (13).